Clement of Alexandria

and Early Christian Views of Martyrdom

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Approved

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Preface

Clement was a vagabond. His lust for knowledge compelled him to wander from city to city, or rather, from teacher to teacher across the eastern Mediterranean. In Alexandria, he encountered his most beloved teacher, Pantaenus, and decided to put down roots.[1] There, Clement served as an influential Christian teacher until he was driven out by persecution in 202 CE. His final years were spent in Palestine.[2]

Clement's rhetorical brilliance is reflected in his writings, which are distinguished by the seamless integration of Greek philosophy and Christian theology. Having experienced persecution firsthand, Clement addresses the topic of martyrdom in Book IV of his notably enigmatic *Stromateis*. Evidenced by his statement that "many refutations of the heterodox await us...,"[3] Clement's treatment of martyrdom is supposed to be informative, but also correctional toward those who hold "heretical" views of bodily suffering and martyrdom.

I chose to study Clement because his discourse on martyrdom exemplifies the diversity of the early church. By demonstrating the lack of consensus among second-century Christians about martyrdom, a prominent symbol of the Christian faith, Clement's writings convey that the early church was not a beacon of uniformity prior to the occurrence of splintering debates in later

[1]Clement, *Stromata* I (1) 11.

[2]Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6 (14) 8.

[3]Clement, *Strom.* IV (1) 2.

centuries but was instead comprised of individuals who maintained a vast array of theologies and practices. As he delves into the issues of death, suffering, materialism, and the nature of Christ, Clement enlightens his modern audience to the diversity that characterized Christianity as early as the second century.

Chapter 1: Alexandria

Introduction

We cannot begin to understand Clement's stance on martyrdom without first considering the context in which he lived. The setting is late second-century Alexandria, a Roman epicenter of trade and education situated on the northwest coast of Egypt. According to Strabo, the city was erected in 331 BCE by Alexander the Great on the site of the Egyptian village Rhakotis.[4] When Alexander's Hellenistic Empire was divided among three of his generals following his death, Ptolemy I became the ruler of Egypt and began the Ptolemaic dynasty. During his reign, Alexandria replaced Memphis as the capital of Egypt and prospered as an economic and educational hub.[5]

Since archaeological evidence from Alexandria preceding the fourth century CE is scarce, much of our insight about Christianity in second- and third-century Alexandria is derived from textual evidence. One of the largest contributors of this evidence is Eusebius, an author whose validity is often called into question due to his failure to witness firsthand many of the events he describes, the frequency with which he stakes claims that have no support from other

[4] Strabo, *Geographica,* XVII (1) 6.

[5]Birger Pearson, "Egypt" in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origins to Constantine,* ed. Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 334.

sources, and the possibility that he falsified his records in order to assert his own agenda.[6] There is evidence that Eusebius' accounts are blemished by a variety of fallacies; for example, his *Church History* is peppered with anachronisms and postulations that we have good reason to doubt.[7]

Be that as it may, we would have little to no knowledge of Alexandrian Christianity if it were not for the information we are able to glean from Eusebius' documentation. If held to the same high standards that scholars criticize Eusebius for failing to meet, many sources would likely be deemed unreliable and we would be forced to discard multitudes of crucial documents that constitute the very foundation upon which our understanding of history is built. Therefore, I will treat Eusebius as a source from which some knowledge about Christians in second- and third-century Alexandria can be gathered.

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[6]In response to those who believe that Eusebius abused his platform and T.D. Barnes writes of Eusebius, "He did not compose his major works under the influence of Constantine, nor was he primarily an apologist who wrote to defend the Christian faith at a time of danger. As Eusebius grew to manhood, the peaceful triumph of Christianity seemed already assured: Eusebius began as a scholar, made himself into a historian, and turned to apologetics only under the pressure of circumstances" (T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius,* 104). To provide more evidence for this claim, Andrew James Carriker, in *The Library of Eusebius of Caesarea,* attempts to reconstruct the library that would have been available to Eusebius while he was composing his histories, posing that problems in his texts were not deliberately inserted by him, but exist as a result of flaws in the sources he used firsthand (45-68).

[7]For instance, Eusebius states that Origen was the pupil of Clement. Yet Clement and Origin never mention each other in any of their works. It seems highly unlikely that, in addition to the absence of other external evidence, both Clement and Origin would go unmentioned by one another if they were truly teacher and student. One possible explanation of this is that Eusebius, upon hearing that Origen was Clement's successor at the Catechetical School in Alexandria, assumed the existence of this relationship that did not, in actuality, exist. Additionally, Eusebius' mention of Philo praising the work of Mark in Alexandria is anachronistic because Philo died too early to have seen the growth of Christianity following Mark's arrival. Carriker poses that these issues were simply a result of Eusebius (or an intermediary scribe) attempting to bridge the gaps between his sources (*The Library of Eusebius of Caesarea,* 47-49).

The Cultural Climate of Alexandria

During the second and third centuries CE, Alexandria appears to have boasted a population of notable heterogeneity. The city was divided into five quarters which hosted people from a variety of ethnic groups.[8] Although Alexandria maintained separation from Egypt, Egyptian culture permeated the city through its Egyptian quarter where some native members of the village of Rhakotis remained. In the *Anabasis of Alexander*, Alexander's plan to erect some temples for the worship of Egyptian gods upon founding Alexandria suggests that Egyptian religious practices were assimilated into the otherwise Hellenistic culture.[9]

Additionally, Jewish culture was salient in Alexandria. Having fled from Palestine to Egypt as early as the sixth century BCE, the population of the Alexandrian Jewish community numbered in the hundreds of thousands by the first century CE.[10] In Philo's *Embassy to Gaius*, Philo acts as a representative of the Alexandrian Jewish community before Caligula, demanding that Caligula restore the rights previously designated to them by the Ptolemies.[11] The text suggests that members of the Alexandrian Jewish community, although they endured occasional persecution, were able to practice their ancestral customs in Alexandria through the early second century.[12] They had a magnificent synagogue and inhabited two of Alexandria's five quarters,

[8]Philo, *Against Flaccus*, 55.

[9]Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* III (1) 5-(2) 2.

[10]Pearson, "Egypt," 335.

[11]Philo, *Embassy to Gaius*, 1-2.

[12]Tessa Rajak, "The Jewish Diaspora" in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origins to Constantine*, ed. Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 55.

indicating their prominent position in Alexandrian culture.[13] When Egypt fell under Roman rule, however, Philo indicates that the relationship between the Greeks and the Jews became strained as a result of taxes on non-Greeks imposed by the government. In response, the Jews revolted against Trajan in 115 CE, which led to the decimation of their population in the city.

As early as the seventh century BCE, Greeks arrived in the livable region of Egypt surrounding the Nile.[14] The founding of Alexandria by Alexander the Great, who famously propagated Greek culture throughout his kingdom, augmented the presence of Greek culture in Egypt. The ethnic tension that arose between the Greeks and Jews during Roman rule underscores the political and cultural prestige that the Greeks enjoyed in the city. Although the city was planted within the geographical bounds of Egypt, it was considered separate from Egypt (*Alexandria ad Aegyptum*), and maintained a distinctively Greek identity.

Christianity in Alexandria

The Christian community in Alexandria was a microcosm of the cosmopolitan city itself, encapsulating the city's diversity with its wide range of adherents from different backgrounds. Eusebius attests to the apostolic foundation of Alexandrian Christianity when he tells of Mark, a Jewish disciple of Christ, bringing Christianity to Alexandria:

> They say that this Mark was the first to be sent to preach in Egypt the Gospel which he had also put into writing, and was the first to establish Churches in Alexandria itself. The number of men and women who were there converted at the first attempt was so great, and their asceticism was so extraordinarily philosophic, that Philo thought it right to describe their conduct and assemblies and meals and all the rest of their manner of life.[15]

[13]*Ibid.*

[14]Pearson, "Egypt," 335.

[15]Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* II (16).

Paul's contemporary Apollos also serves as evidence of the Jewish Christian community in Alexandria.[16] In Acts, it is stated that Apollos, "an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures,"[17] was a Jewish Christian from Alexandria. Furthermore, the influence of Judaism on the Alexandrian church is reflected in the church's adoption of the hierarchical system employed in the synagogue. The teachers (*didaskaloi*) and presbyters (*presbyteroi*) of the Alexandrian church presided over religious education from pre-baptismal instruction to high theology, mirroring the distinctive teaching roles modeled by rabbis and elders in the Jewish community.[18]

However, after the Jewish population in Alexandria was decimated and its influence diminished in the years following the Diaspora revolt (115-117 CE), the framework of Christian education in Alexandria drew increasingly from other influences. The Jewish community continued to have some impact through the writings of Jewish authors such as Philo and through the Septuagint, which was first translated from Hebrew to Greek in Alexandria. The extent of their influence on Alexandrian Christianity, however, was surpassed by that of the pagans. Considering the Greek matrix of Alexandrian Christianity, it is no surprise that Christian education espoused the same teaching model commonly demonstrated by secular educators in Greek culture.

Extant texts that were produced and read by different Christian groups in Alexandria strengthen the impression that Alexandrian Christianity was culturally diverse and ethnically

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[16]Corinthians 1:3.

[17]Acts 18:24-25.

[18]Roelof Van den Broek, "The Christian 'School' in Alexandria in the Second and Third Centuries," in *Centuries of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East*, ed. Jan Willem Drijvers and Alasdair A. MacDonald (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 43.

heterogeneous. For instance, *The Gospel of the Hebrews,* which is preserved only in fragments, appears to be a gospel used by the Alexandrian Jewish Christians. Its distinctively Jewish roots are evidenced by its indebtedness to Jewish wisdom theology and its preferment of James of Jerusalem. Another example is *The Epistle of Barnabas,* a text that, if indeed written in Alexandria, indicates the presence of an apocalyptic movement in Alexandria. The text holds a dependent yet hostile opinion of Judaism, building upon narratives from the Torah while criticizing them for being insufficient for salvation and perpetuating a false religion.[19] Both Clement's and Origen's references to the *Gospel of the Egyptians,* a text which portrays the ascetic tendencies of the Egyptian Christians through its rejection of sex and procreation, is evidence of the presence of Egyptian Christian culture, if indeed the text belonged to them.[20]

Based on this scarce evidence, it appears that Christianity in second century Alexandria was by no means homogenous, comprising members from various ethnic groups who held a broad spectrum of beliefs and cultural backgrounds. There was not a single cohesive body of Christians, but rather a vast array of doctrinally and organizationally diverse Christian groups and movements in Alexandria. Moreover, the dominance of the different Christian groups in Alexandria fluctuated over time as the political and cultural climate in the city constantly changed.

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[19]"Epistle of Barnabas" in *The Apostolic Fathers, Volume II: Epistle of Barnabas. Papias and Quadratus. Epistle to Diognetus. The Shepherd of Hermas*. Edited by Bart Ehrman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 3-4.

[20]Bart Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, *The Other Gospels* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 117. Scholars debate whether the title of the text was given to distinguish it from texts used by Christians elsewhere, or whether the title was meant to indicate that the text was used by gentiles in Egypt. By reason that Jews could also be Egyptian, the former meaning of the title is considered more plausible than the latter.

The Intellectual Climate of Alexandria

Another noteworthy characteristic of Christianity in Alexandria is that it was likely shaped by the city's exceedingly intellectual climate. Alexandria arose amidst the intense propagation of Hellenism by Alexander the Great and his Ptolemaic successors. Among the aspects of Hellenistic culture bolstered under Ptolemaic rule was Greek education, which seems to have taken a strong hold in Alexandria with the establishment of the Alexandria Library and the Museum. Collections of literature including oratory, poetry, philosophy, medicine, law, and miscellaneous works proliferated at the library. This was due to the highly intellectual atmosphere in Alexandria and the availability of papyrus, the plant that was used as material upon which the texts were written. The Library primarily functioned to provide archives for scholarly research, while the Museum was a place where resident scholars indulged in intellectual conversation and received oral instruction pertaining to subjects such as rhetoric and medicine.[21]

The school system in Alexandria, on the other hand, was significantly less institutionalized. Far different from modern universities, schools were unofficial and formed around individual teachers whose expertise and reputation were enough to attract eager students. Attendance was voluntary and individuals had the opportunity to choose which teacher to study under.

[21]Robert W. Smith, *The Art of Rhetoric in Alexandria: It's Theory and Practice in the Ancient World* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 15-17. It is worth noting that the aforementioned educational resources would have only been available to individuals who belonged to a certain demographic. For example, the use of the library was restricted to citizens of Alexandria, and the cost of education through the Museum would have made it exclusive to middle- and upper-class individuals.

In 48 BCE, some educational resources were lost when many documents from the library were destroyed during the Roman siege. Nonetheless, Alexandria remained distinguished by its bookish climate and scholarship, and literary production continued to prosper in the second and early third century CE. Clement testifies to the academic climate of Alexandria when recalling how he came to the city for the sake of education and eventually encountered a beloved teacher, Pantaenus:

> When I came upon the last (he was the first in power), having tracked him out concealed in Egypt, I found rest. He, the true one, the Sicilian bee, gathering the spoil of the flowers of the prophetic and apostolic meadow, engendered in the souls of his hearers a deathless element of knowledge.[22]

Upon the arrival of Christianity in Alexandria in the first century, a new form of education developed. Possibly in opposition to a kind of teaching promoted at the Museum, Eusebius claims that Mark founded the Alexandrian Catechetical School.[23] Clement makes no mention of Mark in relation to the school, but appears to believe that he himself has learned the teachings of the apostles from Pantaenus, stating,

> These teachers, then, preserved the true tradition of the blessed doctrine derived directly from the holy apostles Peter, James, John, and Paul—the son receiving from the father, but few were like the fathers. By God's will, then, they came also to us to deposit those ancestral and apostolic seeds.[24]

Bold claims of apostolic tradition of a kind expressed in Clement's passage were characteristic of the early Christian tradition. Regardless of whether or not Mark introduced Christianity to Alexandria and founded the Catechetical School, its teachers and adherents would have believed they were receiving teachings that originated from Jesus himself.

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[22]Clement, *Strom.* I (1) 11.

[23]Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* (5) 10.

[24]Clement, *Strom*. I (11) 3.

Contrary to the curriculum of the secular educational institutions in Alexandria, the objective of the Catechetical school, as described by Clement, was "practical, not theoretical, and its aim [was] to improve the soul, not to teach, and to train it up to a virtuous, not an intellectual life."[25] What Clement seems to imply is that the school was primarily concerned with religious education. Eusebius, in contrast, states that Christian teachers in Alexandria not only provided their students with a religious education, but also with knowledge of secular subjects such as geometry, arithmetic, and philosophy.[26] It may have been that this supplementary secular curriculum was implemented with the induction of Origen as the head of the school following Clement's departure, or that Eusebius was attempting to present the Christian school as being superior to the other educational institutions in Alexandria.

Regardless of whether or not the curriculum offered by the Catechetical School was strictly religious, it is likely that the intellectual character of Alexandrian culture heavily influenced the Christian teachings that were provided there. This is demonstrated by Origen, Clement's successor as head of the Catechetical School, who tailored his Christian teachings to be more intellectual. Origen hoped that equipping his students with a defense of the faith that appealed to the mind as well as the heart would allow the Christian faith to prevail against intellectual opposition.[27] Based on this knowledge, it seems plausible that other teachers at the Catechetical School would adapt their lessons similarly, either to appeal to the intellectuals of Alexandria or to provide their students with erudite defenses of their faith to wield against

[25]Clement, *Paed*. I (1) 1-2.

[26]Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.,* VI (18) 3.

[27]William H. Oliver, "The Heads of the Catechetical School," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 2 (July 2015): 7.

educated opponents. The impact of the local intellectual milieu on Alexandrian Christianity is particularly evident in the philological and exegetical character of Clement's and Origen's writings.

Persecutions of Christians in Alexandria

Much of what we know about the persecution of Christians in second- and third-century Alexandria is derived from Book VI of Eusebius' *Church History.* When Eusebius mentions martyrdom in Alexandria, he signifies that Alexandria was unique in its heightened level of persecution:

> When Severus began to persecute the churches, glorious testimonies were given everywhere by the athletes of religion. This was especially the case in Alexandria, to which city, as to a most prominent theater, athletes of God were brought from Egypt, and all Thebais according to their merit, and won crowns from God through their great patience under many tortures and every mode of death.[28]

This depiction, which paints the victims of persecution as triumphant heroes, is followed by the brief account of the beheading of Leonides, Origen's father, during the reign of Severus.[29] Eusebius also describes an exodus of Christians from the Catechetical School in the face of persecution when he writes of what Origen witnessed:

> But while he was lecturing in the school, as he tells us himself, and there was no one at Alexandria to give instruction in the faith, as all were driven away by the threat of persecution, some of the heathen came to him to hear the word of God.[30]

Eusebius' account of violent persecution does not stand alone in its claims. *The Martyrdom of Potamiena and Basilides,* as recorded by Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist.* VI.5), recounts the story of

[28]Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* VI (1).

[29]*Ibid.*

[30]Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* VI (3).

Potamiena, a devout young woman who is sentenced to physical tortures and a painful death as a consequence of her Christian faith. After she endures harassment from a crowd and torture by boiling pitch, Potamiena is burned to death alongside her mother. The soldier called Basilides has a vision about Potamiena speaking to God on his behalf after he leads her to her execution. In response, he converts to Christianity. Because he is not secretive about his conversion, his fellow soldiers expose him and he is beheaded. This story is specific to Alexandria as it claims that Basilides was a disciple of Origen, and it therefore supports Eusebius's claim that Christians in Alexandria faced violent persecution.

Another noteworthy indicator that persecution towards of Christians occurred in Alexandria in the early third century was the flight of Clement from the city. We can infer from Origen's ascent to the leadership of the Catechetical School in 203 CE that Clement resigned shortly beforehand in 202 CE. As this was the tenth year of Septimius Severus' reign, the time during which, according to Eusebius, "the flame of persecution had been kindled greatly, and multitudes had gained the crown of martyrdom,"[31] it is widely accepted that Clement must have fled Alexandria to escape violent persecution. The likelihood of Severan persecutions in Alexandria becomes even more plausible when we take into account the evidence of violent persecutions occurring in other parts of North Africa during the reign of Severus. *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* is a heart-wrenching martyr act written in the form of a woman's diary that describes the execution of a group of Carthaginian Christians, focusing on the heroic death of a young girl and a new mother in the amphitheater on the birthday of Septimius Severus' son. The text is indicative of violent persecution in North Africa during

[31]Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* VI.2.

Severus' reign, increasing the likelihood that Alexandrian Christians, too, saw violent persecution during that time.

It is important to keep in mind that Christian persecution in Alexandria was not always violent. Clement's *Protrepticus* concentrates on the sense of alienation from the greater community that Christians experienced because of their faith. Interestingly, Christians like Clement and Origen used their knowledge and appropriation of pagan education to connect with the rest of society, overcoming their isolation.

Conclusion

Based on the preceding accounts, we can presume that there was palpable tension surrounding Christianity in Alexandria during the late second and early third centuries. By situating Clement in his contemporary Alexandrian context, with its marked cultural diversity, intellectualist tenor, and the emerging inter-religious tension, we can begin to understand why he felt compelled to write his account of martyrdom in the fourth book of the *Stromateis*.

Chapter Two: Clement's "True Martyrdom"

Stromateis Book IV

Of Clement's three extant major works, his *Stromateis* has received the most scrutiny among scholars. Bearing the appropriate title "*Miscellanies," or "Patchwork,"* the work has often been criticized for its apparent lack of coherence and structure. Clement himself was fully aware of the shortcomings of his non-linear and synthetic expository procedure. As he states in opening section of Book IV, which addresses the issue of martyrdom,

> Let these notes of ours (*hupomnêmata),* as we have often said for the sake of those that consult them carelessly and unskillfully, be of varied character—and as the name itself indicates, patched together—passing constantly from one thing to another, and in the series of discussions hinting at one thing and demonstrating another. "For those who seek for gold," says Heraclitus, "dig much earth and find little gold" (frag. 22 D-K). But those who are of the truly golden race, in mining for what is allied to them, will find the much in little. For the word will find one to understand it. The *Miscellanies of Notes* contribute, then, to the recollection and expression of truth in the case of him who is able to investigate with reason.[32]

As indicated in the above passage, Clement's choice of the versatile genre of the "miscellany of notes" has a clear underlying rationale: it invites the reader to uncover a single common thread—Heraclitus's "little gold"—that unites seemingly disparate scraps of information taken from various philosophical, religious, and theological traditions. This common thread is a universal and perennial wisdom, first disseminated by the heavenly Logos among the wisest of the Jews, 'barbarian' sages and Greek philosophers, and then fully revealed in the teachings of Jesus, the

[32]Clement, *Strom.* IV (2) 4.

Logos incarnate, and his followers. This is why, in Book IV, Clement first lays down theological and philosophical foundations of martyrdom before engaging in an intra-Christian debate about the meaning of this concept and its practical applications. What may seem to some scholars as "a kind of sketch of words and people, lacking sharpness and vitality,"[33] is in fact a carefully woven intertextual web that prepares the audience for the later chapters in Book IV, where Clement unveils his understanding of 'true martyrdom as a lifelong striving for spiritual perfection (*teleiôsis).*

Christ and Socrates: Clement and Platonic Philosophy

Clement begins by laying a foundation of intertextual references, interlacing quotes from various philosophical, Jewish, and Christian texts to illuminate their shared understanding of the nature of god, cosmos, and humanity. The Platonist background of Clement's view of true martyrdom becomes evident from his direct quotes of Socrates and numerous references to Platonic themes, from the dualism of forms and physical copies through the superior role of intellect to the dichotomy of the body and soul. In his initial discussion regarding importance of the law, Clement writes:

> And Socrates says, "that the law was not made for the sake of the good." But the cavillers did not know even this, as the apostle says, "that he who loveth his brother worketh not evil;" for this, "Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal; and if there be any other commandment, it is comprehended in the word, Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself." So also is it said, "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." And "if he that loveth his neighbour worketh no evil," and if "every commandment is comprehended in this, the loving our neighbour," the commandments, by menacing with fear, work love, not hatred. Wherefore the law is productive of the emotion of fear. "So that the law is holy," and in truth "spiritual," according to the apostle.[34]

[33]John Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria* (New York: Twain Publishers, Inc., 1975), 109.

[34]Clement, *Str.* IV (3) 9.

Here, Clement yokes together Socrates and Christ, using the teachings of Christ to expound upon a direct quote from Socrates. By doing so, he indicates that Christ is the superior version of Socrates, teaching the same truths, but with a fullness of knowledge that Socrates does not convey. This parallel of Socrates and Christ is strengthened when he later writes,

> The severance, therefore, of the soul from the body, made a life-long study, produces in the philosopher gnostic alacrity, so that he is easily able to bear natural death, which is the dissolution of the chains which bind the soul to the body. "For the world is crucified to me, and I to the world," the [apostle] says; "and now I live, though in the flesh, as having my conversation in heaven."[35]

In *Phaedo,* as Socrates' execution is quickly approaching, he is visited by friends and engages them in a conversation about whether or not it is acceptable for a man to take his own life. Socrates declares that it is wrongful for a man to take his own life on the basis that man is a possession of the gods. Contrarily, Socrates explains that the same is not true for philosophers. Regarding the soul, he states,

> Whenever none of these things bothers it, neither hearing nor sight nor pain, nor any pleasure either, but whenever it comes to be alone by itself as far as possible, disregarding the body, and whenever, having the least possible communion and contact with it, it strives for reality.[36]

To Socrates, truth is not revealed by sense perceptions, but rather obtained through intellect alone. Therefore, perceptions of the body do not aid, but instead hinder the soul's search for truth by way of distraction. Thus, Clement's mention of the 'severance of the soul from the body' is a reference to Socrates' assertion that the only solution to this problem is to separate the soul from the body by dying.

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[35]Clement, *Str.* IV (3) 12.

[36]*Timaeus* 65B.

Furthermore, Socrates states, "all who practice philosophy aright are practicing nothing other than dying and being dead."[37] If philosophizing is simply a rehearsal for death, it follows that Socrates deems suicide acceptable for the philosopher, for it would be wrong to prevent him from seizing what he has devoted his life to preparing for. The distinction between an ordinary man taking his life and a philosopher doing so is the difference in their attitudes toward death. The philosopher, in his desire to attain truth, and having practiced sufficiently enough to be in the right mindset toward death, approaches it with eagerness rather than fear. Thus, Socrates concludes that it is permissible for the philosopher alone to take his own life, and that whenever he faces death, he should welcome it. Hence Clement's mention of the "gnostic alacrity" as a product of a life devoted to philosophy, which makes the philosopher "easily able to bear natural death," is a reference to the teachings of Socrates in *Phaedo*. By pairing this reference with a direct quote from Paul, Clement continues to draw parallels between Socrates and Christ, reflecting the influence of Platonic philosophy on his Christology and his true martyrdom.[38]

[37]Plato, *Timaeus* 64A.

[38]Clement's heavy reliance upon Platonism indicates more than his education in Greek philosophy. In the same way that he draws from the works of Plato, he also refers to a variety of other Greek philosophers, Greek and Roman history, the Old Testament, and the New Testament, skillfully weaving together concepts from seemingly disparate sources in order to present comprehensive assertions that appeal to a diverse audience. Clement's ability to do this evidences his argumentative brilliance, which I believe is strong evidence that Book IV of his *Stromateis* was not an assemblage of unrelated notes haphazardly bound together, but was assiduously planned and penned in a way that Clement believed would present the most comprehensive account of true martyrdom.

Human Perfection and the Faculties of the Soul

"It will follow, I think, that I should treat of martyrdom, and of who the perfect man is."[39] Book IV of the *Stromateis* begins promptly with Clement plainly stating his purpose. He briefly outlines the matters that must be addressed in order to accomplish this purpose. Clement distinguishes his work from others in the genre of 'miscellanies' (*stromateis)* by hinting that it possesses an element of totality.[40]

Although he warns that the course towards truth may be strenuous, Clement does not heedlessly storm into a disorganized attestation of true martyrdom. Deliberately following a carefully structured outline in order to make the most compelling case for true martyrdom, Clement begins by providing the background necessary to situate his concerns within the theological and ethical bounds instituted by Scripture. Concerning the condition of man, he states:

> He is like, it appears to me, the Centaur, a Thessalian figment, compounded of a rational and irrational part, of soul and body. Well, the body tills the ground, and hastes to it; but the soul is raised to God: trained in the true philosophy, it speeds to its kindred above, turning away from the lusts of the body, and besides these, from toil and fear, although we have shown that patience and fear belong to the good man.[41]

Clement not only establishes the dichotomy of the body and soul, but also introduces the two faculties through which man can strive for perfection.

The first faculty is self-restraint. According to Clement, "To restrain oneself from doing good is the work of vice; but to keep from wrong is the beginning of salvation."[42] To Clement,

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[39]Clement, *Str*. IV (1) 1.

[40]Clement, *Str*. VII (18) 3.

[41]Clement, *Str*. IV (3) 8.

[42]*Ibid.*

man chooses whether or not to sin because he possesses free will. Therefore, in order to attain perfection, man must choose to refrain all of the sins available for him to commit. Revealing his high regard for the Old Testament, Clement explains that self-restraint as a faculty of Christian perfection is perpetuated by the Ten Commandments, which provide a list of behaviors that man should refrain from doing, and by the Sabbath, which requires man to abstain from evils.[43]

Self-restraint alone, however, is not sufficient for achieving perfection. Additionally, man must also practice contemplation:

> The severance, therefore, of the soul from the body, made a life-long study, produces in the philosopher gnostic alacrity, so that he is easily able to bear natural death, which is the dissolution of the chains which bind the soul to the body. "For the world is crucified to me, and I to the world," the [apostle] says; "and now I live, though in the flesh, as having my conversation in heaven."[44]

In consonance with Plato, Clement suggests that a man whose life is devoted to contemplation will discover that death is not evil, but instead is the process through which the soul and body are able to separate. As he states in the analysis of the grades of virtue, "it is the sum of all virtue, in my opinion, when the Lord teaches us that for love to God we must gnostically despise death."[45] Thus the severance of body and soul is desirable because it allows the soul, no longer bridled by the body, to ascend toward truth. In Book II of the *Stromateis*, Clement declares that passions are irrational desires that distract the mind and inspire reckless disobedience to God.[46] Contemplation, then, serves not only to eliminate man's fear of death, but also to eradicate all

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[43]Clement, *Str*. IV (3) 8.

[44]Clement, *Str*. IV (3) 12.

[45]Clement, *Str*. IV (6) 27.

[46]Clement, *Str*. II (13) 59.

passions that serve as distractions from God and anchor the soul to earthly things. When he has dismissed all of his passions, man can at last allow the love of God to be the center of his life.

Martyrdom as Spiritual Exercise

Having equipped his audience with an explanation of human perfection that is fundamental to comprehending his concept of true martyrdom, Clement moves on to the subject of martyrdom and continues to situate this notion within its appropriate philosophical and theological context. He denies the claim that death is the crown of true martyrdom as others have suggested, suggesting instead that it is a peripheral matter that need only be addressed if a situation arises. Instead of testifying in a single moment before death, the true martyr devotes his entire life to practicing martyrdom:

> If the confession to God is martyrdom, each soul which has lived purely in the knowledge of God, which has obeyed the commandments, is a witness both by life and word, in whatever way it may be released from the body, – shedding faith as blood along its whole life till its departure.[47]

Man must do two things in order to testify with his life and be regarded as a true martyr. First, he must live purely in the knowledge of God. Here, Clement alludes to contemplation, one of the highest mental faculties presented earlier in Book IV. Second, man must 'obey the commandments," which refers back to abstinence from sin, the other faculty of human perfection given. With these allusions, Clement builds upon what he has previously established in order to present the core of his true martyrdom. By equating the two ways in which a man can make his life a testimony of God and perform true martyrdom with the two faculties of the soul necessary

[47]Clement, *Str*. IV (4) 14.

to achieve human perfection, Clement illustrates that true martyrdom is spiritual exercise. Following the true martyr's life of confession,

> With good courage, then, he goes to the Lord, his friend, for whom he voluntarily gave his body, and, as his judges hoped, his soul, hearing from our Saviour the words of poetry, "Dear brother," by reason of the similarity of his life. We call martyrdom perfection, not because the man comes to the end of his life as others, but because he has exhibited the perfect work of love.[48]

The individual, having testified with his life by wholly devoting himself to becoming perfect through the imitation of Christ, is distinguished as a true martyr by his likeness to God. How this is accomplished Clement explains in the following way: "And for those who are aiming at perfection there is proposed the rational gnosis, the foundation of which is 'the sacred Triad.' 'Faith, hope, love; but the greatest of these is love,'" referring to the Pauline categories of spiritual gifts as fundamental to achieving perfection.

To Clement, 'rational gnosis' is the fruit of a process through which man is gradually perfected by performing spiritual exercises. Outlining the process he writes, "The first step to salvation is the instruction accompanied with fear, in consequence of which we abstain from what is wrong; and the second is hope, by reason of which we desire the best things; but love, as is fitting, perfects, by training now according to knowledge."[49] The partitioning of the process into steps reveals that it is sequential in nature, so each step provides experience necessary for proceeding to the next.

The first step is instruction because "it is impossible to attain knowledge (*gnosis*) by bad conduct."[50] Initially, adherence to the law serves to inspire fear and facilitate proper conduct,

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[48]Clement, *Str*. IV (4) 13.

[49]Clement, *Str*. IV (7) 50.

[50]Clement, *Str*. IV (21) 130.

such as the specific behaviors prescribed in the Ten Commandments. "But now in the Gospel the Gnostic attains proficiency not only by making use of the law as a step, but by understanding and comprehending it,"[51] so receiving and applying instruction leads to next step toward perfection, contemplation.

"Knowledge itself suffices as the reason for contemplation,"[52] for the knowledge attained through contemplation is "the purification of the leading faculty of the soul."[53] To Clement, the soul must be purified of the passions which burden it.[54] Once purified, the desired state of "impassible identity,"[55] or impassivity (*apatheia*), may be approached. Impassivity is beneficial because it allows acts to be performed entirely out of love, the greatest virtue,[56] rather than fear or other passions. "The same work, then, presents a difference, according as it is done by fear, or accomplished by love,"[57] so actions performed purely in love warrant a greater reward than those tainted by other passions. This reward, because love gradually perfects the individual,[58] is the

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[51]*Ibid.*

[52]Clement, *Str*. IV (22) 146.

[53]Clement, *Str*. IV (6) 39.

[54]Clement, *Str*. IV (18) 94.

[55]Clement, *Str*. IV (6) 40.

[56]Clement, *Str*. IV (7) 52.

[57]Clement, *Str*. IV (18) 114.

[58]*Ibid.*

ascension of the soul toward the perfection of God[59] – an allusion to the Platonic theory that souls climb toward the intelligible realm through the process of deification.[60]

Concerning pain, Clement writes:

> When pain is present, the soul appears to decline from it, and to deem release from present pain a precious thing. At that moment it slackens from studies, when the other virtues also are neglected. And yet we do not say that it is virtue itself which suffers, for virtue is not affected by disease. But he who is partaker of both, of virtue and the disease, is afflicted by the pressure of the latter; and if he who has not yet attained the habit of self-command be not a high-souled man, he is distraught; and the inability to endure it is found equivalent to fleeing from it.[61]

Maintaining neutrality of the body, Clement argues that pain cannot harm virtue itself, pointing to Job as an example of a man who did not waver from his virtuousness despite his suffering. Yet Clement poses that pain, while it cannot harm virtue itself, can be a detriment to the soul by distracting man from God. Since only a well-practiced individual would be able to endure pain and not falter from his strict adherence to virtue, Clement argues that man should not be castigated for choosing to retreat from pain to avoid straying from virtuous conduct.

Poverty is considered in a similar manner. Clement disagrees with those who believe that a virtuous man must live ascetically, arguing that basic necessities are essential to living virtuously because they allow man to focus wholeheartedly on spiritual exercise.[62] For example, according to Clement man should not refrain from eating because the resulting hunger would

[59]Clement, *Str*. IV (18) 116.

[60]Plato, *Republic*, 521c.

[61]*Str*. IV (5) 19.

[62]*Str*. IV (3) 12.

distract the mind from God. Hence the body should not be deprived as some have suggested, but instead should be cared for so the man can devote his full attention to God.[63]

The true martyr's attitudes toward death, pain, and material things are to be shaped by the passionless state he has achieved through spiritual exercise. In every situation, Clement states that the true martyr does what he must to eliminate passions that may arise so that he may wholly devote himself to God. Passions of excess, such as wealth, and passions of deficiency, such as hunger, both serve as disturbances to contemplation. By ridding himself of all passions and becoming increasingly similar to Christ through uninhibited spiritual exercise, the true martyr's unburdened soul is able to ascend to heavenly things.

A noteworthy aspect of Clement's true martyrdom is that it does not exclude women. Clement boasts extensively of women from both the Old Testament, such as Judith and Esther, as well as women from Greek history, such as Lysidica and Philotera, who were considered virtuous, demonstrating qualities such as great modesty and faithfulness.[64] He concludes from their stories that women, too, are capable of achieving human perfection and thus can also be true martyrs. However, the ways in which women embody virtue differ from those of men. A virtuous woman, according to Clement, does all that she can to bring virtue into her home by being a good wife who is obedient to her husband, loving her children, and maintaining an honorable marriage so long as it is in her control. Thus, Clement not only suggests that women are capable of true martyrdom, but also that marriage can provide opportunities through which

[63]*Str*. IV (6) 25.

[64]Clement, *Str*. IV (19) 118.

human perfection can be cultivated and is therefore not a wrongful union as suggested by Basilides, one of Clement's principal opponents in Book IV.[65]

Martyrdom and Its Scriptural Basis

By presenting the faculties which are necessary for human perfection, Clement has established a comprehensive basis upon which he is at last able to explicitly assert his definition of a true martyr. He states:

> It is inevitable, then, that those who confess themselves to belong to Christ, but find themselves in the midst of the devil's works, suffer the most hostile treatment. For it is written, "Lost he deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officers of Satan's kingdom." "For I am persuaded that neither death," through the assault of persecutors, "nor life" in this world, "nor angels," the apostate ones, " nor powers" (and Satan's power is the life which he chose, for such are the powers and principalities of darkness belonging to him), "nor things present," amid which we exist during the time of life, as the hope entertained by the soldier, and the merchant's gain, "nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature," in consequence of the energy proper to a man, -- opposes the faith of him who acts according to free choice. "Creature" is synonymous with activity, being our work, and such activity "shall not be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." You have got a compendious account of the gnostic martyr.[66]

Having already pieced together the intricacies of true martyrdom, Clement at last extracts a simple definition of true martyrdom from a single sentence from Paul's letter to the Romans (Rom 8:38), guiding his audience with terse interpolations to reveal how each statement relates to what has been resolved in earlier sections of Book IV.

It is not those who hastily profess their faith to garner opposition who should be called true martyrs, but those who are inseparable from God's love through their devotion to good works. While abstinence from sin and contemplation are ways in which man can strive for

[65]Clement, *Str.* III (1) 1.

[66]Clement, *Str.* IV (14) 96.

perfection, the intention with which they are performed is crucial as well. "We call martyrdom perfection, not because the man comes to the end of his life as others, but because he has exhibited the perfect work of love,[67]" As Clement writes early in Book IV, declaring that the true martyr must not only devote his life to virtue and good works but also be inclined to do so out of his love of God rather than his fear of death, is a special mental state that is brought about only through contemplation. At the end of the book, he reveals why love is a vital component of true martyrdom. Freed from passions and inspired only by the love of God rather than the fear of death, Clement's true martyr truly resembles Christ and accordingly lives a distinguished life in which every choice he makes testifies of God. Clement concludes Book IV with a brief reassertion of his claims.

Conclusion

The intentionality with which Clement presents his sequence of ideas becomes evident through a careful reading of Book IV of the *Stromateis*. Knowing that similarity to Christ and apathy toward death are complex issues that are fundamental to understanding true martyrdom, Clement tactfully addresses these topics before delving into their roles in true martyrdom. He first gives a thorough explanation of the tenets of human perfection and the faculties through which man can strive to achieve it before he addresses man's attitude toward death, refuting the false claims of others before asserting his own. Only after he has imbued his audience with knowledge of many seemingly unrelated topics does Clement unveil that his true martyrdom is a tapestry ('*stromateis*') in which all of these different threads are all woven together to create an elaborate illustration of true martyrdom as imitating Christ and testifying of God with one's life. Contrary

[67]Clement, *Str*. IV (4) 14.

to assertions made by many scholars, Book IV of Clement's *Stromateis* is not merely a compilation of unrelated notes. Instead, it is a brilliantly crafted holistic portrayal and defense of true spiritual martyrdom.

Chapter Three: Conceptions of Martyrdom in Second-Century Alexandria

Clement and His Opponents

The polemical section of Book IV is a window through which modern readers can catch a glimpse of second-century Christian debates about the nature and purpose of martyrdom. In this section, Clement introduces a diverse group of Christian thinkers whose views of martyrdom differ from his own. To fortify his own claims about what martyrdom entails, he investigates the theological disparities that led to his opponents' varied conceptions of martyrdom.

Valentinus

Among the Christian adversaries confronted by Clement is Valentinus, a distinguished Gnostic teacher. Much of the knowledge we have about Valentinus and his teachings has been gleaned from hostile comments by other authors, such as Irenaeus and Tertullian, and from a number of texts unearthed in the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library, including the *Gospel of Truth*, one of the most influential works of the Valentinian school.[68] Valentinus was born in the Egyptian Delta around 100 CE and probably spent his youth in Alexandria before moving to Rome and assuming an important role in the vibrant life of Roman Christian community. While

[68]Jens Holzhausen, "Valentinus" in *The Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. by Wouter J. Hanegraaf, Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek, and Jean-Pierre Brach (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1147.

in Alexandria, he was rumored to have been a student of Theudas who claimed to have been taught by Paul.[69] While there is little evidence from which we can speculate the popularity of his teachings in second-century Alexandria, the writings of Tertullian suggest that he gained significant prominence in Rome during the mid-second century.[70]

Valentinus is known for using Platonist philosophy to reinterpret Jewish and Christian literature and authenticate his own mythology and eschatology. He teaches that Jews and Christians alike are mistaken in their conceptions of God, arguing that the creator God of Genesis is a limited and condescending deity that created the physical world in which we live, imprisoning therein the immortal souls which previously dwelled in a superior spiritual realm. A scarce number of fragments preserved from Valentinus's treatises, letters, and homilies is primarily addressed to these incarnate souls living in the oblivion of their spiritual homeland. In one of them he writes as follows:

> From the beginning you are immortal and children of eternal life.
> You wished to distribute death amongst yourselves
> so as to consume it and annihilate it,
> and so that death might die in and through you.
> For when you dissolve the world
> and are not yourselves dissolved,
> you rule over creation and over the whole of corruption.[71]

Valentinus divides humankind into three groups: *pneumatics*, those who have an immortal spiritual substance breathed into their material bodies, *psychics*, those who possess rational soul and free will, and *hylics*, the inferior humans who belong to material world and act on irrational

[69]Clement, *Str*. VII (106) 4.

[70]Tertullian, *Against the Valentinians* (4).

[71]Valentinus, Fragment 4, trans. Bentley Layton (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 224.

impulses. The elect pneumatics, upon attaining knowledge of their origins, realize that they must triumph over the corrupt world in which they exist by rejecting material things and thereby abolishing death.[72] Unlike the other two human classes, they are able to separate themselves from the experiences of their physical bodies. Martyrdom in the form of voluntary death following public confession of one's Christian identity before the authorities is thus reproached by Valentinus because death is the work of the creator's hands.[73] By separating the Johannine and Mosaic God, Valentinus devalues the imitation of Christ through martyrdom, averring that the pneumatic Christ did not suffer on the cross.

Clement responds to this rejection of martyrdom by defending the unity of the Johannine God and the creator God and by vindicating primacy of Christ's suffering.[74] He quotes Philippians 1:29-2:2 and 2:20-21, which extols the endurance of suffering:

> "And this is of God, that it is given to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake; having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me. If there is therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any communion of spirit, of any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye may be of the same mind, having the same love, unanimous, thinking one thing," "And if he is offered on the sacrifice and service of faith, joying and rejoicing."[75]

Clement concludes that there is value in martyrdom and suffering because Christ, who came to abolish death, did in fact suffer during the crucifixion. While man is expected to honor the commands of God throughout his life, a life sacrificed for the faith is also celebrated. He next

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[72]Jens Holzhausen, "Valentinus," *The Dictionary of Gnosis*, 1147.

[73]Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 157.

[74]Clement, *Str*. IV (13) 89.

[75]Clement, *Str*. IV (8) 58.

proceeds to explain that sin is a choice, not an inborn quality as Valentinus would have it, so "the perfect man ought therefore to practice love, and thence to haste to the divine friendship, fulfilling the commandments from love."[76]

It is imperative that we refrain from assuming that Clement shares our modern conception of love, which is specifically carnal love (*eros*). Illustrating his definition of love or charity (*agapê*), when he writes, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments,"[77] Clement reveals that love is not simply an emotional drive. It is "the bond of perfection," the positive emotion that keeps the soul focused on God by eradicating negative passions, just as "perfect love casts out fear."[78] Love, as it gradually brings about perfection,[79] is visibly expressed through prominent acts that proclaim faithfulness.[80]

Just as we must heed Clement's use of the word 'love,' we must also do so with his references to 'faith' (*pistis*). Thus, in *Stromateis* III he writes,

> Continence is an ignoring of the body in accordance with the confession of faith in God. For continence is not merely a matter of sexual abstinence, but applies also to the other things for which the soul has an evil desire because it is not satisfied with the necessities of life. There is also a continence of the tongue, of money, of use, and of desire. It does not only teach us to exercise self-control; it is rather that self-control is granted to us, since it is a divine power and grace.[81]

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[76]Clement, *Str*. IV (13) 94.

[77]Clement, *Str*. IV (16) 104.

[78]*Ibid.*

[79]Clement, *Str*. IV (7) 54.

[80]Clement, *Str*. IV (4) 13.

[81]Clement, *Str*. III (1) 4.

Maintaining the belief that the body is neutral rather than evil,[82] Clement asserts that faith, through its divine essence, empowers a man to pay no attention to his body and refrain from pursuing evil desires. The soul is cultivated not only by love, but also by faith.[83]

Understanding these terms more clearly, we can better comprehend Clement's call to love and faith. He suggests that a man who practices love and fulfills its commandments will cultivate in himself indifference toward this world, not because it is the loathsome creation of an imperfect God as postulated by Valentinus, but because love will remind him that his residence in this world is temporary, just as faith will allow him to avoid indulgence in temporary pleasures.

Voluntary Martyrs

Unlike Valentinus, many of Clement's opponents were not so doctrinally divergent. While concluding his critique of Valentinus's teachings, Clement briefly rebukes those who follow "the new prophecy"[84] and fail to practice his teachings of love. His mention of Phrygians is further evidence that he is actually referring to Montanism.[85] Largely known through hostile heresiological accounts, Montanism was a Christian movement founded by Montanus in second-century Phrygia. Called "New Prophecy" by its adherents, the Montanist movement was characterized by its heavy emphasis on prophetic revelation, which ultimately led to its

[82]Clement, *Str*. IV (4) 14.

[83]Clement, *Str*. III (4) 26.

[84]Clement, *Str*. IV (8) 59.

[85]*Ibid.*

condemnation as heresy.[86] Based on the frequency with which Montanism is mentioned in the writings of heresiologists, this charismatic branch of Christianity appears to have been a widespread phenomenon, prominent enough in Alexandria to receive mention by both Clement and Origen. With regard to martyrdom, Montanists are said to have practiced voluntary martyrdom, openly disclosing their Christian identity and sometimes boldly presenting themselves to Roman guards and government officials, fully aware that the consequence could be torture or execution.[87]

It is worth noting that Clement addresses the Montanists and voluntary martyrs separately. In some cases, enthusiastic martyrdom is the sole criterion used by modern scholars to identify individuals as adherents of the New Prophecy.[88] However, the lack of a Greek or Latin term for voluntary martyrdom makes it difficult to discern whether or not voluntary martyrdom was an exclusively Montanist practice.[89] Some scholars have argued that the use of voluntary martyrdom as an indicator of Montanism is a misappropriation of a wider phenomenon that was as common to orthodox Christians as it was to their prophetic counterparts.[90] Thus, Clement's separate treatment of voluntary martyrs and Montanists may serve as evidence for this claim.

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[86]Antti Marjaren "Montanism: Egalitarian Ecstatic 'New Prophecy'" in *A Companion to Second Century Christian "Heretics"* edited by Antti Marjaren and Petri Luomanen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 198.

[87]Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom,* 149.

[88]*Ibid.*

[89]*Ibid.*,150.

[90]*Ibid.*,150-152.

While the Montanists were inspired by their prophesies to run toward death, "proto-orthodox" voluntary martyrs must have had other motivations. Modern scholars have speculated upon a variety of reasons for which this behavior occurred, acknowledging that, to some degree, the motivations likely depended upon the individual. Some suggest that the martyrs' tolerance to suffering stemmed from psychopathological masochistic tendencies which turned pain into a desirable source of sexual pleasure.[91] Others argue that views such as these are overly psychologizing and propose instead that the choices were rational decisions guided by a calculated choice of communal faith and loyalty over physical life.[92] More recently, psychosocial theories of fame and social obligation fueling voluntary martyrdom have been put forth.[93]

In Book IV of the *Stromateis,* the earliest source to recognize voluntary martyrdom as distinct from other forms of martyrdom such as faith and conduct or apology,[94] Clement does not offer much insight about this issue. Contrary to his treatment of other opponents, Clement does not appear to be concerned with the specific motives that induced these voluntary martyrs to sacrifice their lives; his sole purpose in this case is to show that their understanding martyrdom

[91]Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 165.

[92]Stark, *The Rise of Christianity,* 167.

[93]Pam Mullins Reaves, "Gnosis, Witness, and Early Christian Identities: The 'True Martyr' in Clement of Alexandria and Gnostic Traditions" PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2013, 24-31. Reaves applies Social Identity Theory, which says that an individual will make major sacrifices in order to preserve their identity as part of a social group, to martyrdom, suggesting that some individuals may have chosen to sacrifice their lives in order to prevent the loss of their own identity through severance from the Christian social group.

[94] Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*,154.

and their resulting behavior are thoroughly misguided and erroneous.

In his polemic with the voluntary martyrs, Clement abandons the gentleness with which he reprimands his other opponents and bluntly denounces their actions:

> Now we, too, say that those who have rushed on death (for there are some, not belonging to us, but sharing the name merely, who are in haste to give themselves up, the poor wretches dying through hatred to the Creator) -- these, we say, banish themselves without being martyrs, even though they are punished publicly. For they do not preserve the characteristic mark of believing martyrdom, inasmuch as they have not known the only true God, but give themselves up to a vain death, as the Gymnosophists of the Indians to useless fire.[95]

The brevity with which Clement addresses the voluntary martyrs in the polemical section of the book reflects his unequivocal disdain toward their behavior. He even quotes Jesus' injunction, "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye to the other,"[96] proving that to seek out persecution amounts to blatantly disobeying Scripture. He writes,

> If he who kills a man of God sins against God, he also who presents himself before the judgment-seat becomes guilty of his death. And such is also the case with him who does not avoid persecution, but out of daring presents himself for capture. Such a one, as far as in him lies, becomes an accomplice in the crime of the persecutor.[97]

Voluntary martyrdom is condemnable not only because the volunteer makes himself an accessory to his own murder, but because God "wishes us neither to be the authors nor abettors of any evil to any one, either to ourselves or the persecutor and murderer."[98] The evil Clement

[95]Clement, *Str*. IV (4) 17.

[96]Clement, *Str*. IV (10) 76.

[97]*Ibid.*

[98]*Ibid.*

refers to is neither death nor persecution.[99] Instead, the acts that are both committed and instigated by the voluntary martyr would create animosity toward them and lead to persecution.

Basilides

Basilides, on the other hand, while credited by Eusebius as being the person from whom Gnostic teachings originated, is not contested by Clement on the grounds of his mythology, but because of his view of martyrdom as punishment. A theologian in Alexandria during Hadrian's reign,[100] Basilides, like Clement, relies heavily upon Greek philosophy in his teachings.[101] He upholds that sin is an innate quality of humans, that providence requires divine retribution, and that even the faultless man must still endure punishment for sins he committed in a previous life.[102] With divine retribution serving as a sort of teaching instrument, Basilides' view of martyrdom is recapitulated by Clement when he writes,

> But the hypothesis of Basilides says that the soul, having sinned before in another life, endures punishment in this – the elect soul with honor by martyrdom, the other purged by appropriate punishment.[103]
>
> "How can this be true, when the confessing and suffering punishment or not depends on ourselves?"[104] –Clement rebuts, defending both man's free will and the justness of providence.

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[99]*Ibid.*

[100]Birger Pearson, "Basilides the Gnostic" in *A Companion to Second Century Christian "Heretics"* edited by Antti Marjaren and Petri Luomanen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1.

[101]*Ibid.*, 28.

[102]Clement, *Str*. IV (12) 81.

[103]*Ibid.*

[104]*Ibid.*

Clement furthers his insistence that Basilides is incorrect when he points out, "But if martyrdom be retribution by way of punishment, then also faith and doctrine, on account of which martyrdom occurs, are co-operators in punishment – what other absurdity could be greater?"[105] In order to preserve God's goodness and providence, it must be concluded that God does not desire our suffering, but sometimes permits it for the sake of good, "For neither did the Lord suffer by the will of the Father, nor are those who are persecuted by the will of God."[106] Martyrdom and suffering, Clement concludes, arise not from divine retribution but from the soul's ownership of free will.

Heracleon

Despite his being called the "most celebrated of Valentinus' school,"[107] details about Heracleon's life remain a mystery to modern scholars. In addition to appearing in the works of Tertullian and Origen, Heracleon is referenced by Irenaeus, indicating that he was likely a well-known figure by 180 CE.[108] While his writings did not survive independently, a number of fragments were preserved in quotes and summaries by other authors. Origen, for example, supplies forty-eight quotes from Heracleon's commentary on the Gospel of John, the earliest commentary on this gospel known to exist.[109]

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[105]Clement, *Str*. IV (12) 82.

[106]*Ibid.*

[107]Clement, *Str*. IV (9) 70.

[108]Einar Thomassen, "Heracleon" in *The Legacy of John: Second Century Reception of the Fourth Gospel* edited by Thomas Rasimus (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 174.

[109]*Ibid.,* 173.

In this text, Heracleon reveals the Valentinian theology hidden in the language and themes of the Johannine gospel.[110] While he indicates that the tenets of Valentinianism can be seen in John if the reader knows what to look for, Heracleon does not call for a total reinterpretation of the text, appearing to regard the gospel itself as an authoritative account of Jesus' ministry.[111] Based on this commentary, in which Heracleon also references Luke and Matthew, and the other extant fragments of his writings, it seems that Heracleon's work was primarily devoted to scriptural exegesis.[112]

Like Origen, Clement also preserved portions of Heracleon's works. From these quotes, much about Heracleon's stance on martyrdom can be gleaned. He distinguishes between two kinds of martyrdom, "confession by faith (*pistis*) and conduct (*politeia*), and one with the voice (*phônê*),"[113] pointing out that the latter is more commonly considered martyrdom. However, from his exegesis of scriptural verses concerning martyrdom, Heracleon concludes that confession by mouth or voice is only partial inasmuch as "hypocrites also can confess with this confession,"[114] and since "all the saved have confessed with the confession made by the voice,"[115] confession by voice fails to distinguish martyrs from ordinary Christians. Instead, he

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[110]Einar Thomassen examines the relationship between the Gospel of John and Valentinian theology in Heracleon's thinking. By comparing the language and the underlying theological, anthropological, and Christological theories of both of the texts, he finds that there is more evidence of Heracleon's interpretation of John being influenced by his Valentinian background than there is evidence of John shaping Heracleon's theology. (Thomassen, 2010, 202-208.)

[111]Thomassen, "Heracleon," 197.

[112]*Ibid.*

[113]Clement, *Str*. IV (9) 71.

[114]Clement, *Str*. IV (9) 71.

[115] *Ibid.*

writes, “that which [Christ] specifies now is universal, that which is by deeds and actions corresponding to faith in Him. This confession is followed by that which is partial,”[116] posing that confession by faith and conduct is superior to confession by voice.

Concerning Heracleon, Clement acknowledges that their stances on martyrdom are largely in concordance. However, he writes,

> But he has not adverted to this, that if some have not by conduct and in their life "confessed Christ before men," they are still manifested to have believed with their internal disposition, that is, by confessing Him with the mouth at the tribunals, and not denying Him when tortured to the death.
>
> And the disposition being confessed, and especially not being changed by death at any time, cuts away all passions which were engendered by corporeal desire. For there is, so to speak, at the close of life a sudden repentance in action, and a true confession toward Christ, in the testimony of the voice.[117]

Clement maintains that Heracleon is mistaken in his understanding of confession by voice as partial and second best. Every witness benefits from this kind of confession: “those in the Church being confirmed, and those of the heathen who have devoted themselves to the search after salvation wondering and being led to the faith; and the rest seized with amazement.”[118] Thus, Heracleon has missed that confession by voice is as necessary a phenomenon as confession by faith and conduct and should therefore not be avoided. While Clement discourages enthusiastic martyrdom, he still sees the value in confession by mouth when it is necessary to avoid denying

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[116]*Ibid.*

[117]Clement, *Str*. IV (9) 74.

[118]Clement, *Str*. IV (9) 75.

God, writing of martyrs, "if occasion call, enduring without stumbling, afflictions for the Church, 'they may drink the cup.'"[119]

Clement addresses even prior to his polemical section those who, in their conviction that relinquishing life is the greatest sacrifice, hasten to embrace martyrdom. Clement appears to parallel the two ways in which the perfection of salvation can be attained, namely works and knowledge,[120] with the two forms of confession. He quotes Plato,

> "Those, then," says Plato, "who seem called to a holy life, are those who, freed and released from those earthly localities as from prisons, have reached the pure dwelling-place on high." In clearer terms again he expresses the same thing: "Those who by philosophy have been sufficiently purged from those things, live without bodies entirely for all time. Although they are enveloped in certain shapes; in the case of some, of air, and others, of fire." He adds further: "And they reach abodes fairer than those, which it is not easy, nor is there sufficient time now to describe."[121]

While he recognizes the immense value of sacrificing one's life by confessing with the voice, Clement emphasizes that lifelong devotion to philosophy in order to purify the soul produces equally valuable results.

Conclusion

In Book IV of the *Stromateis*, Clement not only defines his concept of true martyrdom but also defends it against contrary claims proposed by other Christians. He uses a Socratic to approach to explore the assertions of various Christian opponents and casts an intermediary position between those who reject martyrdom entirely and others who regard it with great reverence. While he values the sacrifice made by those who choose to die rather than deny God, true

[119]*Ibid.*

[120]Clement, *Str*. IV (6) 40.

[121]Clement, *Str*. IV (6) 39.

martyrdom for Clement amounts to doing everything within one's power in order to live as a perfect Gnostic in both faith and deed.

Conclusion

In Book IV of his *Stromateis,* Clement of Alexandria defines martyrdom:

> Alone, therefore, the Lord, for the purification of the men who plotted against Him and disbelieved Him, "drank the cup" (Matt 20:22), in imitation of whom the apostles, that they might be in reality Gnostics, and perfect, suffered for the Churches which they founded.
>
> So, then, also the Gnostics who tread in the footsteps of the apostles ought to be sinless, and, out of love to the Lord, to love also their brother; so that, if occasion call, enduring without stumbling, afflictions for the Church, "they may drink the cup."
>
> Those who witness (*martyroun*) in their life by deed, and at the tribunal by word, whether entertaining hope or surmising fear, are better than those who confess salvation by their mouth alone.
>
> But if one ascends also to love (*agapê*), he is a really blessed and true martyr, having confessed perfectly both to the commandments and to God through the Lord; whom having loved, he acknowledged a brother, giving himself up wholly for God, resigning pleasantly and lovingly the man when asked, like a deposit.[122]

In the earliest centuries of Christianity, the Greek word "martyr" evolved from a secular word meaning "witness" into a prominent symbol of the Christian faith. In Book IV of his *Stromateis,* Clement provides an opportunity for the modern reader to see how the definition and scope of martyrdom, while gradually taking on a distinctly Christian overtone, was continually disputed amongst second-century Alexandrian Christians. To some, martyrdom was a positive testimony of faith that should be actively sought out; to others, it was the counterpart to living piously to

[122]Clement, *Strom.* IV (9) 75.

promote the love of God; and to others still, to be "martyred" in the sense of dying for one's faith was to miss the point of the faith entirely.

As Clement and his opponents have revealed, the argued definitions of martyrdom varied as a consequence of Christian heterogeneity; whether individual groups maintained different theologies or simply interpreted Scripture in a different way, divergent conclusions were often drawn and passionately adhered to. Today, the word "martyr" often brings to mind images of saints achieving eternal renown for enduring horrific tortures and cruel executions in the name of their faith. In second- and early third-century Alexandria, however, the response would not have been so unequivocal and monolithic.

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